

Libby - health care

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05/21/2009 11:23 AM

To Carol Campbell/R8/USEPA/US@EPA
cc
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Subject Fw: Baucus Press release Today

From Carol's email today.

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— Forwarded by Shirley Kelley/RA/R8/USEPA/US on 05/21/2009 11:23 AM —

Bob Sussman/DC/USEPA/US



05/21/2009 10:58 AM

To Carol Rushin/R8/USEPA/US@EPA, Barry
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cc

Subject Baucus Press release Today

FYI, here is the press release we put out today.

BAUCUS: HEALTH CARE FUNDING HEADED TO LIBBY
Senator Says Federal Funding Could Lay The Groundwork For A Public Health
Emergency

(Washington D.C.) Montana Senator Max Baucus today announced that funding is being sent to Libby to provide health care for people with asbestos-related illness and help pave the way for a possible public health emergency.

Baucus said tomorrow the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will announce a \$6 million grant opportunity for the Lincoln County Health Department and a consortium of at least three health care entities to provide screenings and health care services to people battling asbestos-related illnesses.

"This funding is vital to folks up in Libby who are victims of asbestos-related disease, and will benefit a lot of people," Baucus said. "And just as important, it could lay the groundwork for the next step in this process - the declaration of a public health emergency."

Baucus said that if a public health emergency is declared, the Federal Government would be required to provide health care to Libby residents with asbestos-related disease.

The grant from HHS would then serve as part of the Federal Government's effort to build the capacity on the ground in Lincoln County to meet its obligation should a public health emergency be declared.

A public health emergency would authorize cleanup work in homes and other structures as well as require the Federal government to provide screenings and health care for Libby residents with asbestos related disease.

The public health emergency would be declared by the Environmental Protection Administration.

"I've talked with the head of HHS, Kathleen Sebelius and the head of the EPA, Lisa Jackson, and they both know how important it is to help the folks in Libby," Baucus said. "We all have been working for months together to figure out how to best help folks affected by this tragedy."

Examples of potential consortium members identified by HHS include the Center for Asbestos - Related Diseases (CARD) Clinic, Lincoln County Community Health Center (LCCHC), St. John's Lutheran Hospital, or the Montana Department of Public Health and Human services (MD-PHHS.)

Baucus has been a long time champion of getting a public health emergency declared in Libby. In 2008, Baucus released a report detailing a 2002 attempt by the EPA to declare a Public Health Emergency that was thwarted by the previous Administration's Office of Management and Budget.

Baucus lambasted the decision to not declare a public health emergency at the time, calling it an "outrage."

Since news reports linked widespread deaths and illness to exposure to deadly asbestos fibers at the defunct W.R Grace and Co. mine, Baucus has visited Libby personally more than 20 times, secured millions for healthcare and cleanup, brought numerous White House cabinet secretaries to the town, helped save the CARD clinic, and has dogged the EPA to keep cleanup efforts moving forward.

Baucus said this is one more step in his decade-long fight to bring justice to folks in Libby "who were poisoned at the hands of Grace."

"I made a promise that I intend to keep," Baucus said. "I have every confidence that a Public Health Emergency will be declared in Libby. We won't stop pushing until that happens. We expect this Administration to make decisions based on sound science and to right the sins of the last Administration."

Baucus is chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over HHS, as well as a senior member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee which has jurisdiction over the EPA.